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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8877
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2429
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2602
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3787
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4996
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1907
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0999
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0943
RUEHBAD/AMCONSUL PERTH 0762
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 2645
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000865

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, DRL, DRL/AWH, DRL/IRF
NSC FOR EPHU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KIRF](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM -- CHURCHES UNDER PRESSURE

REF: A. JAKARTA 846

[1B.](#) 07 JAKARTA 343
[1C.](#) 06 JAKARTA 5772 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY: Activists and Indonesian Christians are concerned that pressure from extremist Islamic groups on churches will continue in the lead-up to 2009 national elections as holier-than-thou demagoguery trumps tolerance. Authorities have used a 2006 decree regulating licenses for houses of worship to close at least four churches in 2007 while over 100 were attacked or threatened. Christian groups continue to try to navigate in a difficult situation where obtaining an official license can be tricky and Islamic militants seem to hold the upper hand. That said, the vast majority of Indonesian Christians continue to worship freely.
END SUMMARY.

CHURCH CLOSURES CONTINUE

[¶2.](#) (C) Church closures and attacks are continuing in areas of Indonesia. According to church groups, more than 100 churches have faced violent attacks or intimidation in the past two years (most of the incidents have been in the West Java and Jakarta regions). At least four West Java and Jakarta churches were closed in 2007, according to reports from the Protestant Indonesian Communion of Churches (PGI). Oscar Sinorat, a lawyer representing the closed churches on the Religious Violence Defense Team (TPKB), a legal NGO, said he expects pressure on churches to increase in the run-up to the 2009 elections. Albertus Patty, a Bandung-based minister and vocal religious freedom advocate, expressed a similar concern to poloff on April 17. (Note: Roughly 7-10 percent of Indonesians are Christian, roughly divided among Catholics, and Mainstream and Evangelical Protestants.)

[¶3.](#) (C) Anic H. T., Director of the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), told poloff April 30 that the

pressure on minority religious groups will likely increase leading up to the 2009 elections because Islam is such a hot political commodity in parts of Indonesia. At the local levels, even parties that at the national level are not strongly Islamic use conservative Islamic jargon, he said. "Anti-Islamic labeling is politically very powerful," he added. As a result, protection of non-mainstream religions and religious minorities may continue to suffer if government officials bow to the political popularity of the very conservative minority. Attacks against Muslim splinter group Ahmadiyah (ref A), and continuing attacks against churches, are examples of this, contacts said.

TYRANNY OF THE MAJORITY?

¶4. (C) Extremist Islamic groups use the 2006 Joint Ministerial Decree on houses of worship to exert pressure on churches. According to Sinorat, in each of the four church closure cases, the pattern of threats and closures was the same: extremist groups from outside the community--such as the Islamic Defender's Front (FPI) and the Anti-Apostate Movement Alliance (AGAP)--approach grassroots community leaders and pressure them to agree to ask a church to close. They also pressure--in favor of perceived Muslim interests--the Local Religious Community Forum (FKUB), bodies set up nationally under the Joint Ministerial Decree, to resolve problems regarding licensing for houses of worship (ref B).

¶5. (C) Extremist groups essentially present church leaders with forms from the FKUB, stating that the forum has decided the church should close. Members of one Bogor, West Java church who received a threat to close told poloff that the local Ulema Forum had filed complaints with local officials that resulted in the Bogor Mayor revoking their church's permit on February 8.

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¶6. (C) The FKUB is subject to pressure from "outside interests" and is often used to legitimize church closures, Jus Felix Mewengkang, a Catholic priest from a closed church said. This in part is because Christians form a minority in the FKUBs, where decisions are made by up-or-down vote. Christians are often reluctant to speak up in communities in which they are a minority, Sinorat said.

THE LICENSE IS THE THING

¶7. (C) Many churches face obstacles to obtaining a license, although members of some churches told poloff they continue to worship without one in spite of fears of being closed down. Fewer than 20 percent of the nearly 2000 churches in West Java are licensed. Extortion was also a factor in obtaining permits to build or renovate. In one case, although a Jakarta church had prepared the documentation legally required for a renovation permit, police advised it not to renovate because of strong opposition from FPI.

¶8. (SBU) Some churches have moved services to malls rather than deal with threats and the challenges of obtaining a license, one church leader told poloff. Shopping malls in West Java are home to a growing number of Christian congregations, with more than 10 in one mall alone, according to press reports. Worshipers admit that they moved to malls to avoid intimidation by extremist Islamic groups.

PRESSING INDONESIA

¶9. (C) Indonesia, over all, has had a positive record in regard to religious freedom and tolerance. That said, since the advent of democracy in 1998, that record has taken some serious hits, including via serious ethno-religious violence in various regions to pressure on Muslim sects (like the Ahmadiyah) to the pattern of church closings described above.

¶10. (C) Given the scope of the problem, we continue to raise our concerns with the GOI and to contacts in Muslim groups, and there are Muslim moderates who have underscored their concerns publicly. The current political season gives the upper hand to Muslim militants and politicians playing for votes, however. In the meantime, Indonesia's Christians will continue to have to navigate within this very difficult terrain. That said, the vast majority of Indonesian Christians continue to worship freely. (Note: Mission is currently preparing its Religious Freedom Report for 2007 which reviews some of these issues.)

HUME